

Ruby Rogers

The Standard, ASL

Designer of the Year

NSPA 2024 submission



Statement

A year ago, I was abruptly inserted into the world of graphic design by becoming my newspaper's Features Editor: Print. Having never touched Adobe software before, I stumbled through Indesign and Illustrator tutorials for weeks before successfully managing to design the centerspread of my first issue alone. Now, seven print issues later, I have the privilege of serving my publication as Editor-in-Chief: Print, where I aim to foster visual creativity and risk-taking among our staff.

My experience working as a Features editor allowed me to understand that design and storytelling go hand-and-hand. A good story is grounded in humanness. It is driven by emotion, connection, and empathy. A good design lifts that narrative higher. Humans are visual; we consume the world through our eyes. A good designer is the invisible force that empowers and elevates. They pull the strings and make the million little choices that go both seen and unseen.

The works in this portfolio reflect just that: design that is wholeheartedly rooted in the story, in the text, in the people. As a section editor, I was able to read each and every one of these stories before designing them, and watch them grow. This offered me a greater insight into the stories themselves - a view into the lives of the people they concerned, that I kept at the heart of every choice while laying out.

My process always starts on paper. I love to sketch out a page multiple times, lightly crossing things out and coloring things in as I go. To me, paper is the freest place to start a design - there are no rules, no restrictions, no pressure. Now, as Editor-in-Chief, I encourage my team of print editors to start with paper and pencil, as this allows more risk-taking and creativity. I encourage them to find colors with intention, to play with shape and how it can interact with text, to experiment so their designs always serve a purpose, and, above all, to ensure their designs raise the story up. My Deputy Editor-in-chief and I have turned our print process into one of collaboration and risk-taking, where we encourage our designers to think outside the box, try new things, fail and persevere, and always start with the story.

I will admit, in my heart I am a journalist. Yet all designers are journalists - they are conveying a message. Telling a story. Words are no longer words but colors, lines, space, balance and hierarchy. A designer of the year is not just a designer, but a storyteller, who weaves together text and image to grow and empower a narrative. It is easy to get lost in the hours of time, the excruciating patience required to move around the pieces, to solve the puzzle. Yet I always remind myself that at the core of every text box and vector point, there is a source, a writer, a reader. Throughout my year as a print editor, I have pushed myself to create not just for the page, or the design, but for the people behind the words, the people inside the story.

Students in reflect on school's support system

Alexia Banti /
Reporter

The Eddie Rosenberg (27), the Special Learning Differences pod is not just a space where neurodivergent students are nurtured by learning specialists, but a place for self-discovery and building relationships with other students he relates to.

"SLD allowed us to connect deeply with an important part of my identity," Rosenberg said. "I am understood more about myself and others in the community who experience the same challenges."

Students in SLD receive other support only or meet regularly in a club period, where they learn planning and learning strategies as well as receive direct help from learning specialists.

High School Learning Specialist Heather Starr said the school's SLD program aims to help students who have learning differences with everything they need to thrive in school.

"The neurodivergent students I work with are first seen and accepted," Starr said. "I want every student with a diagnosis or without a diagnosis to feel supported and valued for who they are."

The term neurodivergent is used to describe people whose brain functions and processes differ from the majority, such as those with dyslexia, ADHD or ASD. Neurodiversity refers to the variation in cognitive function and the wide range of different neurological differences found in humans.

Neurodiversity Club Co-President Noah Stilian (22) said the SLD program has not only allowed him to build organizational and learning skills but also gives him a space to meet other neurodivergent people.

"We are taught the basics about how to learn and not just what we are learning, which definitely helps in the next stages of your life," Stilian said. "It's a great environment for learning, and just for meeting friends."

Similarly, Gabriela Sierra (27) said SLD class allows her to build relationships with other students in her class period.

"I get to connect with the people in my class and I get to connect more with teachers and build relationships throughout the entire High School," Sierra said.

Rosenberg said the responsiveness of the learning specialists has made the program very effective in providing him with a reliable support network.

"SLD for teachers are always available in the SLD pod and it's a great environment," Rosenberg said. "Everyone is open to supporting you and contributing to the team."

Stian said her SLD class gives her the space and time to have direct contact with teachers to get support and ask questions.

"Everyone here has their own set of skills and can help me get my work done," Stian said. "All the teachers are really supportive and if you need something, they'll help you with it."



Furthermore, Starr said a priority of the SLD team is that the program continues to be adaptive and do everything possible to support students and teachers.

"As diagnosis change and as the student changes and as we learn more, we always just need to be adapting," Starr said. "There are adjustments that I would definitely say are part of our mission."

Additionally, Starr said neurodivergent students at the school founded the Neurodiversity Club the year ago as a space for students to share their stories and educate the community.

Starr said for the club, she implemented partnerships with neurodivergent students from the Lower School and Middle School, as well as the Learning Differences pod.

Stilian said the opportunity to become a leader of the club and help others understand their different learning styles has been so helpful.

"I've been in the Neurodiversity Club since sixth grade and I've really grown in it," Stilian said. "Now I can much better how they can use their learning differences as a superpower."

Furthermore, Starr said the Neurodiversity Club's student-led initiatives have made a huge impact on the school's culture.

"The journey of the students to share their educational journey has been life-changing for so many people, myself included," Starr said. "You see them and how valuable the students are

will be to be shared with faculty to share with the community and to share with younger students."

Rosenberg said fostering discussion about accommodations created for neurodivergent students helps them become better understood at school, in people's lives and in society.

"Normalizing it [neurodiversity] means speaking out about it, it would be more of an acceptance," Rosenberg said. "I think just everyone was uncomfortable speaking about it, it would be more of an acceptance."

Looking forward, Stilian said he hopes to see people having more direct conversations about neurodiversity at the school about neurodivergent struggles in a way to combat stereotypes and misconceptions.

"People get these stereotypes in their head about neurodivergent people and it can be harmful," Stilian said. "Having that more personal connection and not just talking at a person about those things and talking with them would be more helpful."

Stian said she wants neurodivergent students to know they should not feel they need to "change" if they struggle at school, instead, the school's approach must change in order to accommodate their needs.

"The way we do things needs to change," Starr said. "I hope that as a school and as a community, we are always looking at ways that we can change those systems, in every single student's path, so we can accept, support and make them thrive."

For this spread, I wanted to emphasize the beauty and creativity that can come with neurodiversity, as this story highlights the community of our school's program for students with specific learning differences, where uniqueness is celebrated. Thus, I wanted this spread to be a celebration - of color, form, line, shape, and balance. This piece was centerspread of our issue, and I aimed to take advantage of that - I wanted the brain, in the very center of the paper, to open in a flourish of radiating color, expanding. I used a color palette and layered, wavy designs, inspired by retro '70s advertisements. Additionally, I made the specialty "SLD" font myself on Illustrator to bring attention to the acronym that largely represents the neurodiverse community in our school. The symmetry of the spread keeps it balanced, combining the curvy with the linear, the fun and creative with the seriousness of the substance in the piece - nuanced, just like neurodiversity. The circles in the right corner keep the spread from being too heavy with all the solid color in the center, and emphasize the central graphic. With the regular columns of text keeping the story accessible and the vibrant color and bold designs making it engaging, it is a celebration of specific learning differences.

